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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 001589

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZIER AND AF/SPG
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ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2012
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: S/E NATSIOS MEETING WITH PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR
MUSTAFA OSMAN ISMAIL

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1557
[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 1569

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In an October 6 meeting with S/E Natsios, Presidential Advisor Mustafa Osman Ismail charged that a hostile United States has poisoned the atmosphere, and that the U.S. must prove itself a neutral partner before Sudan can accept its proposals to reduce tensions between North and South. S/E Natsios responded that the U.S. cannot remain neutral in the face of horrendous atrocities it knows have been committed in Darfur, that it has no desire to mediate North-South disputes, and that the confidence-building proposals he was putting forward do not depend on U.S. neutrality and should be accepted by Sudan in its own interest. Ismail said that the National Congress Party (NCP) will study the U.S. ideas, but that what is needed is a comprehensive solution that will address Sudan's overall relationship with the international community, including the United States. On October 9, Dr. Ismail phoned CDA Fernandez to say that NCP's reaction to the American suggestions was "positive," with a few caveats.

Getting CPA Back on Track

[1](#)2. (SBU) In an October 6 meeting, S/E Natsios told Sudanese Presidential Advisor Mustafa Osman Ismail that, while he had visited Darfur, the focus of his visit to Sudan was North-South issues. The West's current attention on Darfur had distracted it from how the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is being implemented. He stated that the CPA's impact has been overwhelmingly positive. The South is benefiting from peace, although not as quickly as hoped. There is no more killing, and S/E Natsios had witnessed the construction and commerce now underway during his visit to Juba.

[1](#)3. (SBU) However, he continued, since January the North-South climate has deteriorated. Both sides are using much more aggressive rhetoric. S/E Natsios said he was struck that both sides are saying the same negative things about each other. He cited a World Bank study showing that 50 percent of peace agreements collapse during implementation. The CPA risks suffering that fate, he said. Some in U.S. are saying that CPA already has failed. S/E Natsios did not believe the CPA has failed, but

implementation is off track.

14. (SBU) S/E Natsios told Ismail that when he met in his meeting with Nafie Ali Nafie on October 4 (ref b), Nafie said that in the worst case scenario, the South will vote for secession in 2011 and the country will split apart. S/E Natsios strongly disagreed with this assessment. The worst case is growing anger on both sides, fueled by a series of small, bad things. In such an atmosphere, spontaneous actions by field-grade SAF and SPLM officers could trigger a violent incident. Such a clash could very quickly escalate into a conventional conflict much worse than Darfur, with tens of thousands of casualties within a few weeks. Consequences for both sides would be disastrous. If this happens he warned, given the atmosphere of mistrust, the West would automatically blame Khartoum government, no matter who is immediately at fault.

15. (SBU) S/E Natsios said Ismail probably already was acquainted with the set of confidence-building steps that Natsios had proposed earlier to Nafie (complete text in ref a). He also had shared the same ideas with First Vice President Salva Kiir in Juba, who had told Natsios that the North would never agree. S/E Natsios told Ismail that the NCP needs to prove to the South they are wrong. Both sides are practicing brinkmanship, he warned, and underestimating the chances of an armed clash. There is a real danger that they will lose their balance and tumble over the edge.

U.S. Must Prove Its Neutrality First

16. (C) Ismail agreed with S/E Natsios that CPA

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implementation is benefiting the South, noting oil-revenue sharing, the establishment of the Government of National Unity, and non-interference by Khartoum in the GoSS. Ismail also agreed that the international community's focus on Darfur has detracted from the CPA process. This, he charged, was largely the fault of the United States, which had created a contentious atmosphere by calling the Darfur conflict & genocide.⁸ This, he contended, reflected Washington's hostility toward Khartoum. S/E Natsios responded that the United States cannot remain neutral in the face of & horrendous atrocities,⁸ such as those that it knows have taken place in Darfur. CDA Fernandez said that the U.S. only was responding to the facts on the ground created by the NCP, noting that "Janjawid leader Musa Hilal is not a Zionist, but your creation."

17. (C) Ismail compared Natsios' comments to "Colin Powell lying at the UN about Iraqi WMD" and continued that Khartoum does not believe the U.S. is neutral in its dealing with Sudan. He asserted that President Bush had publicly included Sudan on a list of countries targeted for time change,⁸ a charge S/E Natsios and the CDA disputed. (Note: Ismail is referring to a June 6 POTUS speech in Prague that lumped Sudan along with Belarus, Burma, Cuba, North Korea and Zimbabwe as one of the "world's worst dictatorships.") Ismail stated that the U.S. will have to demonstrate its neutrality, before the NCP can agree to a U.S. role in resolving CPA issues.

Not Neutral, but Unbiased

18. (C) S/E Natsios repeated that the U.S. cannot be neutral in the context of what had happened in Darfur. CDA added that the U.S. could not pretend that events in Darfur had not happened. The U.S. could not promise to neutral in the sense Ismail wanted, but that it could promise to be unbiased. S/E Natsios continued that the U.S. has no interest in mediating North-South disputes. The two parties will have to work

these issues out between themselves. But right now, things are spiraling out of control. Accepting the U.S.-recommended confidence-building initiatives is in Sudan,s, not the U.S.,, interest. If it rejects our ideas and the situation continues to deteriorate, Sudan will have to suffer the consequences.

¶9. (C) Ismail retorted that under its proposal, the United States would be mediating the Abyei dispute, as one of three nations drafting a solution. S/E Natsios noted that Ismail was seizing on one of five measures the U.S. is recommending, that the U.S. would be only one of three countries, with China and Saudi Arabia, two friends of Sudan, as the other two, and that their consensus draft would be only a non-binding proposal, for North and South to decide to accept or reject.

Need a Comprehensive Settlement

¶10. (C) Ismail said that Khartoum is interested in defusing tensions with the South, but argued that more is needed. He suggested increasing the group of countries the U.S. proposed to draft an Abyei solution to four, by adding an African participant, and that the group's mandate be expanded beyond the Abyei question. Abyei is an important issue, Ismail said, but it is not the basic problem. He proposed that this four-country group examine Sudan,s relations with the international community, including the United States.

¶11. (C) Ismail again alleged a general U.S. hostility toward Sudan. He complained that Sudan remains on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. No country is fighting terrorism harder than Sudan is, he contended. He added that as Sudan was close to accepting the provisions of UNSCR 1769, the U.S. imposed a new set of economic sanctions. CDA commented that this reflects the lack of trust that Khartoum's actions have earned in Washington.

¶12. (C) Ismail said that Khartoum will seriously consider the U.S. confidence-building proposals, "we will definitely not through it in the garbage," but he repeated the need for a comprehensive settlement involving the international community, including the U.S. S/E Natsios expressed skepticism, saying that in his experience, most successful

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negotiations are worked out by the parties involved. The wider the circle of participants expanded beyond that group, the less likely a negotiation was to succeed. In any case, the United States, for domestic reasons, is not in a position to propose a comprehensive strategy. S/E Natsios suggested that Sudan approach the UK, which has expressed some interest in such a plan.

¶13. (C) S/E Natsios repeated a point he had raised earlier with Nafie: if North and South agreed to and implemented the confidence-building measures he was proposing, he would be prepared to recommend that the U.S. identify a step desired by Khartoum on which to act, as a way of easing bilateral tensions, although he made clear that he would have to vet this with Washington first.

¶14. (C) Comment: The usually jovial Ismail was given harsh talking points to present, denying any sort of serious violence in Darfur and asking for the usual American quid pro quo in return for improved Sudanese behavior. On October 9, a more pleasant Dr. Ismail called Charge Fernandez to say that, upon reflection, the American proposals were "positive, even very positive," with a few caveats. He said he would follow up on this upon his return from Libya. End comment.

¶15. (U) S/E Natsios did not have an opportunity to clear on this cable.
FERNANDEZ